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CORRESPONDENCE.

The Use of Trinomials.

EDITORS OF 'THE AUK':—

Dear Sirs :—While further discussion of trinomials is perhaps unnecessary I am tempted to comment upon some misleading statements in Mr. Loomis's article in the July issue of 'The Auk,' especially since his paper so thoroughly voices the popular outcry against the recognition of geographic races, and would seem to dispose of the difficulties in the case so easily.

(1) Mr. Loomis's parallel between the recognition in nomenclature of sexes and seasonal plumages on the one hand and geographic races on the other seems ill founded. It is true of course that we do not recognize plumages as distinct species when we have learned their real nature, but any one who has read Dr. Dwight's paper (Auk, 1902, p. 248) will surely admit that we have by no means abandoned a distinct nomenclature for plumages; indeed, the most flagrant trinomial must pale into insignificance beside the "compound juveno-non-nuptial plumage" !

(2) Mr. Loomis constantly speaks of "geographic variants" and "full fledged species" as if the two were readily distinguishable. If he can formulate any way by which we can separate species and subspecies except by individual opinion, he has indeed solved the problem. It seems to me that the one fact that is being inevitably forced upon us by modern systematic study is that the "geographic variants" are the fundamental elements which in any nomenclature must receive primary recognition. Many of our old-time "species" have been found utterly inadequate in their application and the independent recognition of their components and of allied forms unknown when the "species" were established is inevitable. To extend the limits of a "species" to include without further comment such diverse forms as the extremes of the Song Sparrow series would render systematic nomenclature absurd and well nigh useless.

Dr. Allen has to my mind put the matter very clearly when he claimed that we can be no more expected to keep our investigations in systematic zoölogy within the limits easily comprehended by the laity than the histologist can be expected to confine his labors to the same bounds.

Dr. Dwight's statement, after his exhaustive studies of plumages, that "the facts about plumages and moults do not lend themselves to simple explanation" and "will no doubt seem obscure and complicated" applies exactly and with added force to modern systematic researches.

That our present rules of nomenclature may have to be altered in some respects I will admit, but as I have already stated (Condor, 1903, p. 43) I regard the preservation of trinomials as of the greatest importance.

Very truly yours,

WITMER STONE.